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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the central theoretical aspects of the "Languaging in the Content Areas" (LICA) thesis, intended to provide postelementary reading with a sense of definition and purpose compatible with contemporary needs and conditions. The objective of the LICA thesis is not merely to teach students how to read critically what has been written, but to critically examine all that is around so that they may develop a data base of their own from which to extend knowledge. "Languaging" is the term under which LICA theorists combine language learning, dialectical thinking, and the creative process. Languaging involves showing students how a particular view of the world is imparted through selected words in discourse, how dialectical thinking can pattern information and ideas into connected discourse, and how the creative process can be used to redirect ideas from one's personal data base. Ten guiding precepts are listed to outline the scope of the LICA thesis, and four instructional practices relating to the thesis are summarized. (RL)

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Toward A Unifying Theory of Post-Elementary School Reading: The "Languaging in the Content Areas" Thesis

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A patchwork of the experiences, studies, and developments of the last twenty-five years is providing a vague view of a design for what soon may become a unifying theory of post-elementary reading programming. An impression of this still formulating pattern is here called the 'Languaging in the Content Areas', or LICA, thesis.

The LICA thesis is intended to provide post-elementary reading with a sense of definition and purpose compatible with several contemporary needs and conditions. The chief precept of the thesis is most nearly represented by Hutchins' ploy to get people to read the "Great Books". He says, "pull up a chair and listen to our discussion, it has been going on for 2000 years. If you wish to participate, you will need to read these great books so that you can catch-up with where we have been and where we are now."

The LICA thesis takes a more pedagogic tack. It, too, says to the student "pull up a chair" though, to join a discussion in which we (the educated) will help you to participate in a pre-historic effort to push the frontiers of knowledge out further. Thus, the major theme of the LICA design has roots pre-dating literacy and even language. The

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sequence it advocates attempts to recapitulate, in some ways, this evolutionary scheme. First the student is led to a keen awareness of the central questions about life so that he may adopt an attitude of exploration. Then he is taught precision in discerning and labelling the experiences and learning which are derived from his explorations. Simultaneously he is taught how to communicate these orally and how to record these symbolically for others to read. Finally, from this base he is taught how to read and profit from the symbolic records of others.

Two concepts are at the pedagogic center of this thesis to advance language, thinking and reading maturity. They are codified by the names "languaging" and "dialectical thinking." Currently, the thesis focuses on post-elementary reading programming.

This paper provides only a representative portion of the LICA thesis, sufficient to provide a context for understanding the several teaching techniques and studies it has spawned. The thesis itself can be summarized thusly: lessons employing the pedagogic strategy here called 'languaging' (and braced-up by certain other LICA precepts) will result in the improvement of 'dialectical thinking' which, in turn, will advance thinking, language, and reading maturity.

Historical Context: The Evolution to 'Languaging'

For a time secondary school reading has been defined in terms of word recognition, vocabulary, rate, comprehension and study skills. More recently the term "content area reading" has been added, drawing attention to a belief that each subject has its own peculiar set of reading-study skills requirements and that these are best taught by the content

area teacher. The LICA thesis adds the feature of "languaging" - an active verb for language. We have been introduced to the term "languaging" from Postman and Weingartner (1969), but are sure that this is not its origin. The languaging feature is added to stress the importance of teaching students how to examine and codify (label and process) the world about them into sets of symbols which can be readily manipulated to form ideas - ideas which then may be tested for validity by the system of analysis generally called dialectical thinking.

Two key features of "languaging" distinguish it from the Language Arts. One is the proposition that teaching language involves imparting a particular view of the world which is nested in the words selected. To realize this is to understand why language behavior is so resistant to change; changing language often is tantamount to altering perceptions. Those who would cower at the prospect of altering language and perceptions should familarize themselves with the work of Murphy (1955) and Sherk (1974), wherein they demonstrate the dramatic differences in the classes of words found in comparisons of the language protocols of inner-city and other urban children responding to identical picture stimuli. Without the benefit of argument or decision, situations and class differences arbitrarily act to narrow language and perceptions, and therefore, the feelings and thoughts, of disenfranchised youngsters.

Just as language influences perceptions, the use of language in thinking determines the quality of thought. To that extent, 'dialectical thinking' is the system we believe can improve quality of

thought, advance motivation to acquire a more formidable and precise language, as well as increase concern for more exact and comprehensive information; all building blocks to more active, participatory (i.e., mature) reading.

Dialectical thinking is so much a key feature of the LICA thesis, as we now fathom it, that it too warrants additional explanation.

The word "dialectical" is a philosophic term meaning debate, or conversation marked by dynamic tension. The term is most often used in logic, a branch of philosophy dealing with vertification of "knowledge". The term dialectical describes a way of thinking characterized by a reciprocal interaction of information, precepts and ideas struggling to be reconciled into clear patterns of thought. The tension between the ideas striving to be inter-connected, or reconciled, is at the core of all sound learning situations. The purpose of education is to optimize these situations so that students can internalize this intellectual tension and carry on a continuous dialectical within themselves, learning to explore, to be challenged by discrepancies, and yet to feel relatively fulfilled in the face of persisting ambiguities. Thus, the critical objective of the LICA thesis is not merely to teach students how to critically read that which has been written, but to critically examine all that is around so that they may develop a data base of their own from which to extend knowledge. This has extremely pragmatic implications. For example, in this context, the best way to teach critical reading/thinking is to involve students in a creative, problem solving, process

which only incidentally includes criticism. The emphasis on building beyond the current limits of knowledge contributes to the sense that we are trying to stand on the shoulders of those who came before us so that we may see further. Critical thinking issuing from this kind of mind set is bound to be more positive (and generative) than the more usual type which often seems tinged with latent cynicism.

The term 'languaging' in LICA, then, is the result of the collision of at least three major notions: language learning, dialectical thinking and the creative process. It is not completely synonomous with language enrichment - with which it is most likely to be confused, nor with dialectical thinking - which is its seminal feature and medial objective, nor exclusive to the creative process - which is best understood as its primary hue and purpose, but all of these, simultaneously. In addition to these three central notions, the LICA design recognizes several critical ancillary factors with which it shares objectives and operations. Chief among these is the "valuing" process, (Raths, Simon, Harmon, 1971), inquiry training (Manzo and Legenza, 1975), content mastery, and a growing humanistic theme often referred to as "self-discovery"; i.e., an educator's approach to helping students better understand themselves and remain emotionally solvent while living and learning (Sherk and Manzo, 1974).

LICA Objectives Extend Traditional Objectives

In simplest terms the primary objective of the LICA thesis is to produce youngsters who can not only read and say what has been previously

learned and written, but to read creatively, sifting through their own experiences so that they may come to be able to say that which has not been written. It is for the fact of going beyond where we are that lesson activities would stress valuing, dialectical thinking, inquiry, self-discovery, and the 'languaging' of experiences. These functions are not viewed as replacing more traditional objectives such as accurate comprehension, critical analysis and study skills. On the contrary, traditional objectives are heightened in importance. Traditional objectives are the essential basis for creative production. In pragmatic terms, the critical difference in approach is to have students become more consciously aware of those root questions about life, environment and human condition which first stimulated people to evolve present fields of study. Recognizing the root sources around which masses of information have evolved has several potential advantages. It can serve to humanize a field of study which otherwise might appear too abstract, and/or irrelevant. It provides a frame of reference, in the form of a question, for which a mass of information and related questions are frequently offered as answers. It invites thinking beyond the current limits of knowledge by making apparent the limits of current knowledge. It sharpens curiosity by illustrating the motivational sources for a given line of investigation. It reinforces manifestations of curiosity by showing how larger questions are organized into manageable parts. It helps to keep all things in better perspective. Over all, it demonstrates that all studies are essentially humanistic studies. This suggests

that each of us is a participant in every question and every answer, and therefore, entitled, and obliged, to raise new questions and contribute to their resolve.

Guiding Precepts

The LICA thesis embraces instruction, learning, school-wide programming and certain social and community concerns as well. A careful perusal of the scope and nature of the activities composing this confluence suggest several re-occurring themes, or guiding precepts. Ten of the most fundamentals are stated here. Each of these require empirical validation. Current research efforts are providing only indirect assessment of these as they are represented in the various teaching methodologies derived from them and which have been data analyzed for their efficacy as teaching designs.

1) In order for experiences to be deeply learned and transferable to other contexts they must be worked through in language.

2) Most students fail to learn, not because they are being offered too much information, but because they are not being provided with enough.

3) Effective learning, the moving of minds, requires intensive, energy consuming, effort from both teacher and students.

4) Curiosity may be innate, but 'manifest curiosity' must be acquired - i.e., the inclination and ability to express curiosity.

5. The most important role a teacher can play is that of competent model of language, thinking and inquiry behaviors.

6) The search for understanding of self, and of individual potentialities is a rudimentary source of motivation, and can serve as such for students to develop academic skills.

7) Instruction must be arranged so as to permit greater reciprocity (i.e., interaction between students and teacher, and students with one another) so that they may effectively influence one another in assertive versus aggressive or passive-aggressive (or apathetic) ways.

8) Classroom learning occurs in a social context influenced by social-psychological dynamics, these need to be more carefully heeded if lessons are to be successful.

9) The reading teacher should stress the acquisition of factual information from reading selections, just as the content teacher should stress the reading and language requirements of the content field.

10) Only a total, school-wide, concentration on "reading" (which in Robert McCracken's terms is "Only Tiger's Tail") and its associated abilities, attitudes and operations can genuinely be expected to have positive outcomes on skills and learning.

Operations: Specific Teaching/Learning Strategies

An effective thesis is the means to a balanced, social-educational ecology. It suggests the kind and degree of adjustments necessary to achieve a benefit, the confluence of which, is greater than the mere sum of the parts. Frequently, the things to be adjusted are slight, other times they are massive. A few examples of the kinds of pragmatic practices which are part of the LICA effort serve to demonstrate this

point, and provide a concrete point of reference for the class of instructional practices which we believe to be compatible with this formulating perspective. The four summarized below are dealt with more extensively in the papers accompanying this symposium.

. Imbedded Aids - IA's are units of assistance and enrichment built into textual material. They are intended to assist the reader while he is reading. The reading material is made more elastic through the 'Aids' so as to accommodate readers above and below the difficulty level of the textual material proper. One aspect of the 'Aids', particularily, exemplifies the LICA design, it is the interjection of a third party's comments - usually in the form of marginal points or 'Reader Helper Notes' - between the author and the (typically) unsophisticated reader. This third party voice sets up a dynamic tension as it underscores or takes exception to points being made by the author.

Jane Meeks' paper tells of our recent efforts along these lines.

. The REAP Strategy - REAP is a reading, writing, study strategy. It teaches the student how to "language through" complex textual material, and to formulate an incisive, written annotation. The primary objective of the REAP strategy is to cause the student to read more actively. A key ingredient in learning how to do so is by having the student compare his written renditions of what he has read with other students and/or with model statements written by his teacher.

Marilyn Eanet describes the process in more specific terms and recounts a recent experimental assessment of the efficacy of the strategy.

. Intra-Act - Intra-act is a teaching strategy highlighting a formula for post-reading discussion. The discussion follows lines carefully designed to enrich oral language and evaluative thinking (or "valuing"). It exemplifies the importance placed on advancing these bracing skills and abilities in LICA informed reading instruction.

James Hoffman describes the procedure, which he has generated, and his recent efforts to ascertain its qualities as an instructional tact.

. Creative-Thinking-Reading-Activities (CT-RA) - Creative-Thinking-Reading-Activities are exactly what the name suggests; tasks and activities designed to stimulate higher order mental activity. The activities typically involve considerable teacher-student and student-student oral languaging (i.e., thinking and talking aloud with others doing the same). The activities are best understood as mental exercises, they serve as "warm-ups" to active, deliberate reading. The activities are recommended most strongly for remedial level readers, who, by our impression, probably have failed to profit from languaging experiences (or have been deprived of such).

Martha Rapp Haggard tells in her paper how she employed such activities with remedial readers and how they seemed to profit from the lessons.

Critiquing, the LICA thesis holds that reading (and content) lessons must be organized to teach and improve an array of very fundamental factors which, in our impression, are the substrate for mature reading, thinking, and language. Several such factors have been named. Guidelines and precepts for constructing lesson activities have been offered,

explicit lesson strategies exemplified, and appraisal of the quality of lessons and the theoretical construct suggesting them has been begun.

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